



Sergei PROKOFIEV

Lieutenant Kijé Suite

Sergei Prokofiev (27 April 1891 – 5 March 1953) was a Soviet composer, pianist and conductor. As the creator of acknowledged masterpieces across numerous musical genres, he is regarded as one of the major composers of the 20th century. His works include such widely heard works as the March from *The Love for Three Oranges*, the suite *Lieutenant Kijé*, the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* – from which "Dance of the Knights" is taken – and *Peter and the Wolf*. Of the established forms and genres in which he worked, he created – excluding juvenilia – seven completed operas, seven symphonies, eight ballets, five piano concertos, two violin concertos, a cello concerto, a *Symphony-Concerto* for cello and orchestra, and nine completed piano sonatas. A graduate of the St Petersburg Conservatory, Prokofiev initially made his name as an iconoclastic composer-pianist, achieving notoriety with a series of ferociously dissonant and virtuosic works for his instrument, including his first two piano concertos. In 1915 Prokofiev made a decisive break from the standard composer-pianist category with his orchestral *Scythian Suite*, compiled from music originally composed for a ballet commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev of the Ballets Russes. Diaghilev commissioned three further ballets from Prokofiev – *Chout*, *Le pas d'acier* and *The Prodigal Son* – which at the time of their original production all caused a sensation among both critics and colleagues. Prokofiev's greatest interest, however, was opera, and he composed several works in that genre, including *The Gambler* and *The Fiery Angel*. Prokofiev's one operatic success during his lifetime was *The Love for Three Oranges*, composed for the Chicago Opera and subsequently performed over the following decade in Europe and Russia. After the Revolution, Prokofiev left Russia with the official blessing of the Soviet minister Anatoly Lunacharsky, and resided in the United States, then Germany, then Paris, making his living as a composer, pianist and conductor. During that time he married a Spanish singer, Carolina Codina, with whom he had two sons. In the early 1930s, the Great Depression diminished opportunities for Prokofiev's ballets and operas to be staged in America and western Europe. Prokofiev, who regarded himself as composer foremost, resented the time taken by touring as a pianist, and increasingly turned to Soviet Russia for commissions of new music; in 1936 he finally returned to his homeland with his family. He enjoyed some success there – notably with *Lieutenant Kijé*, *Peter and the Wolf*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and perhaps above all with *Alexander Nevsky*. The Nazi invasion of the USSR spurred him to compose his most ambitious work, an operatic version of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In 1948 Prokofiev was attacked for producing "anti-democratic formalism." Nevertheless, he enjoyed personal and artistic support from a new generation of Russian performers, notably Sviatoslav Richter and Mstislav Rostropovich: he wrote his ninth piano sonata for the former and his *Symphony-Concerto* for the latter.

Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kijé* was originally written to accompany the film of the same name, released in March 1934. It was Prokofiev's first attempt at film music, and his first commission. In the early days of sound cinema, among the various distinguished composers ready to try their hand at film music, Prokofiev was not an obvious choice for the commission. Based in Paris for almost a decade, he had a reputation for experimentation and dissonance, characteristics at odds with the cultural norms of the Soviet Union. By early 1933, however, Prokofiev was anxious to return to his homeland, and saw the film commission as an opportunity to write music in a more popular and accessible style. Despite his lack of experience in composing film music, Prokofiev began his *Kijé* score confidently, later writing: "I somehow had no doubts whatever about the musical language for the film". He told the producers, "What is important to me is the era, the internal meaning of each event, the personality of each hero", and warned them not to expect mere musical "illustrations". He attended rehearsals and made detailed notes of the action and the acting. The period setting of the film appealed to Prokofiev; Robinson comments that the *Kijé* score is one of several works, including the *Classical Symphony*, *The Love of Three Oranges*, *Cinderella*, and *War and Peace*, that show "the composer's fondness for the eighteenth century". The language he chose combined elements of humour and romance with an underlying melancholy—he interpreted the story as more tragic than comic. Prokofiev had heard Ravel's *Boléro* in Paris, and had been much impressed by the French composer's use of the saxophone, an instrument then rarely used in orchestral compositions outside France but which suited Prokofiev's intentions perfectly. The composer Gerard McBurney has pointed out the "haunting sounds of the tenor saxophone" that punctuate the *Kijé* music. The critic Ernest Chapman refers to Prokofiev's "unfailingly witty and melodious score". It comprises only about 15 minutes of music, written as a series of 16 short fragments or leitmotifs which are repeated at appropriate times during the film's duration, to highlight specific moments in the drama. This approach was a departure in film music from the established form of broad symphonic movements, and was described by Prokofiev's biographer Daniel Jaffé as "well ahead of its time ... one of the most celebrated [film scores] of that era".